

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 5 June 2019 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J. Reid
(Chairman, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Armstrong, E.
Beynon, J.
Dunbar, C.
Dunn, E.

Gallacher, B.
Gibson, R.
Pattison, W.
Swithenbank, I.C.F.

CABINET MEMBER

Sanderson, H.G.H.

Environment and Local Services

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

P. Johnston
G. Gavin
D. Laux
L. Pyle

S. Nicholson

Interim Executive Director of Place
Head of Neighbourhood Services
Head of Technical Services
Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence
Co-ordinator
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

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1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee were asked to note the following membership and terms of reference for the Communities and Place OSC which were agreed by Council on 1 May 2019.

Chair: J. Reid

Vice Chair: B. Gallacher

Quorum - 3

Armstrong, E. Beynon, J. Cartie, E. Dunbar, C.	Dunn, E. Gibson, R. Pattison, W. Swithenbank, I.C.F.
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Terms of Reference

- (a) To maintain an overview of the Management Agreements in place between the County Council and Active Northumberland, Woodhorn Museum Charitable Trust and Northumberland Tourism.
- (b) To monitor, review and make recommendations about:
 - Development Planning
 - Neighbourhood Planning
 - Conservation
 - Housing
 - Climate Change
 - Countryside, Biodiversity and Landscape Quality
 - Waste Management and Energy Use
 - Public and Community Transport Network and Travel to School
 - Highway Maintenance, Streetscape and the Local Environment
 - Local and Neighbourhood Services
 - Crime, Community Safety, and Fear of Crime
 - Antisocial Behaviour and Domestic Violence
 - Fire and Rescue
 - Emergency Services and Emergency planning
 - Customer Services
 - Provision of Cultural and Leisure Facilities
 - Improving Quality of Life Through Access to Culture and Leisure;
 - Supporting Economic Growth in the Arts, Culture and Leisure Sectors

The Chairman thanked Councillor Swithenbank for the support he had given him as Vice-Chairman during the previous two years and welcomed Councillor Gallacher to that position.

RESOLVED that the membership and terms of reference of the Committee be noted.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Cartie and from Councillors Daley and Homer who were invited as portfolio holders.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 27 March 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

4. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (June to September 2019). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

5. CABINET REPORTS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised members of Cabinet decisions regarding issues previously commented on and been subject of report by this Committee. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORTS

6.1 Market Strategy

This report was presented to the Committee by Councillor Sanderson: Cabinet Member - Environment and Local Services which provided an update on achievements against the 2018 - 23 Markets Strategy action plan and on the current financial position of Council run markets. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix E).

He advised members that he believed Market Towns should have a regular market, which would help to keep towns vibrant by maintaining footfall and attracting tourists in the area. However, he acknowledged that the Council could only subsidise markets to a finite level. He confirmed that it was proposed that a review be conducted later in the year to identify if cost reduction and income generation exercises could return markets run by the Council to provide a surplus and to explore alternative operating arrangements. He advised members that he would welcome the Committee's comments on that proposal.

The Committee commented or sought clarification on the report as follows:

- the bid to the Future High Streets Fund to help regenerate Blyth would include the Market area in the town;
- members recognised that a number of market towns across the county were struggling economically, in many cases for different reasons, and although it may be argued that a market would attract visitors to some towns and

therefore help existing businesses, action should be taken to ensure that stall-holders offered shoppers goods that were not in competition with those businesses;

- Town and Parish Councils would be included in the consultation process;
- there was concern that although 16 of the 24 actions in the plan had been delivered, the plan appeared not to be working and the strategy should therefore be re-examined. Councillor Sanderson confirmed that two markets were continuing to struggle and that the Council was working with them directly to address their issues. He believed that the plan was not failing, but agreed that it presented some challenges;
- although the action regarding the Balance of Trade Policy was shown to be in “red”, Councillor Sanderson advised members that this was not a particular concern at present;
- the Strategy should be commended for areas of forward thinking, such as the promotion of youth markets. The Council should be working with schools, in particular, to encourage more young people to participate in such markets, and
- there was concern that the table showing the income trend over the past four years was unclear to some members in the way it accounted for the rent free period in Blyth in 2017/18. It was agreed that that graphic would be presented more simply in future reports.

The Committee acknowledged the excellent work being done to improve and sustain the County’s markets, but was concerned that the Strategy had not delivered the financial results hoped for.

RESOLVED that

- (a) progress made against the strategy action plan be noted, and
- (b) a review of alternative operating arrangements that could be adopted for all markets currently managed by the County Council’s Neighbourhood Services team, be supported.

6.2 Additional LTP Capital

This report was presented to the Committee by Councillor Sanderson: Cabinet Member - Environment and Local Services which provided information on the programme of schemes undertaken through the additional £7.732m of capital maintenance funding received in November 2018. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix F).

Councillor Sanderson thanked the Head of Technical Services and his staff for their efforts in delivering on the additional programme.

The Committee was advised that waste plastic material was being used as a binding agent in road construction in trials in the Acklington area. Members welcomed this initiative and hoped that the trial would be extended to other parts of the county and that in time, plastic waste from Northumberland would be used in this way.

Members were informed that works to the value of £4.7m had been completed and the remaining allocation would be spent on the schemes listed in Appendix 2 to the report. It was agreed that the information set out in the appendices would be presented in a single dashboard in future reports to allow greater clarity, including the costs allocated to each scheme.

RESOLVED that the programme of schemes undertaken through the additional £7.732m of capital maintenance funding and progress in delivering the programme, be noted.

6.3 Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Support Services Commission Update

The Committee was reminded that In October 2018, Cabinet approved re-commissioning for a two year period, with a contract value of £100,000 per annum, in accordance with a recommendation made by this Committee. This report gave the Committee an overview of the commissioning process since. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

Members were assured that after a competitive process the contract had been awarded to Northumberland CVA (the previous contract holder), which would allow a degree of continuity, particularly regarding the management of the VCS Assembly. Officers would continue to monitor and support the contractor, and a further update to OSC would be prepared at a time when a fuller assessment of progress and any impact of the reduced budget of the commission could be reported.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the report be noted, and
- (b) a further update be provided to the Committee at a time when a meaningful assessment of progress can be made.

6.4 Domestic Violence and Abuse

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on the current partnership work programme to coordinate service provision to tackle the issues and harms caused by domestic violence and abuse in Northumberland. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Members welcomed this report and thanked staff for their work in this area.

Although much of the emphasis of domestic abuse was on the impact on female victims, the Committee were advised that men and boys aged 14 and over would be able to seek support from Cygnus as set out in the report.

The Committee noted that the current Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), who had been an advocate for domestic abuse support, was standing down from her post and wondered whether this may lead to a change in priorities and a reduction in funding. Members were advised that whilst additional resources from the PCC was welcome, it was not the core source of the service's funding. It was also felt that combating domestic abuse would remain a priority for the police.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the update be noted, and
- (b) a further report on the outcome of the Government's consultation on domestic violence and abuse, be presented to the Committee in due course.

7. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2019/20 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix G).

Members noted that there would be a report on the work of the Public Protection Service and indicated that they would raise the issue of stray animals, the Council's responsibilities in this area and the costs involved.

Members also requested reports on:

- Community Safety and Fear of Crime
- Climate Change

RESOLVED that

- (a) the report be noted, and
- (b) the Scrutiny Co-ordinator examine with the Chairmen's Group on how to progress the additions issues raised.

Chairman _____

Date _____